United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General welcomes release in Beirut of American hostage Jesse Turner and of 15 Lebanese detainees held by Israel.

- Secretary-General arrives in Paris to attend special meeting of UNESCO; will witness signing of Cambodian Accords tomorrow, 23 October.

- General Assembly concludes debate on Atomic Energy Agency report; postpones action on draft text to consider Iraqi amendment.

- Secretary-General says durable peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through political settlement.

- Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme tells press conference that ozone depletion is worsening.

- "Significant progress" in talks on armed forces between Government of El Salvador and FMLN; negotiations to resume on 3 November.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar welcomed last night the release in Beirut of Jesse Turner, an American Professor who had been held hostage in Lebanon for almost five years, and of 15 Lebanese detainees released by Israeli authorities.

The Secretary-General was informed of the releases by his Delegate, Giandomenico Picco, who is currently in the Middle East.

Upon arrival in Paris today, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar told correspondents that he would press on with his efforts to obtain the freedom of all hostages and detainees in the Middle East and that he hoped that the process could be concluded before the end of the year.

In a statement last night, the Secretary-General had thanked "the groups in Lebanon" for their cooperation which had helped to bring about the releases. He also expressed appreciation for the assistance he had received

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from Governments, especially Iran, Libya and Syria. He said he was also grateful to the Government of Israel for the release of the 15 Lebanese detainees.

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The Secretary-General arrived today in Paris where he is scheduled to attend this evening a special meeting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference organized as a tribute to him.

This afternoon, the Secretary-General was to have met with Foreign Minister of Tunisia Habib Ben Yahia for a review of the situation in the Middle East.

Tomorrow, 23 October, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar will witness the signing of the Cambodia accords, and will sign the Final Act of the Paris Conference, which has been re-called into session by its Co-Chairmen, the Foreign Minister of France, Roland Dumas, and the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Ali Alatas. The Secretary-General will also meet with the Foreign Ministers of the five permanent members of the Security Council while in Paris for the signing ceremonies.

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The General Assembly this morning concluded debate on the report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), but action on a draft resolution concerning the Agency's report was postponed until tomorrow.

An operative paragraph of the draft resolution, which was introduced yesterday, would have the Assembly note with appreciation the statements and actions of the Agency concerning Iraq's non-compliance with its non-proliferation obligations, and commend the efforts made in implementing Security Council resolutions 687 (1991) and 707 (1991), which called on IAEA to investigate Iraq's nuclear weapons programme.

This morning, Iraq circulated an amendment to the text, by which the Assembly would replace operative paragraph 4 with one that would express "deep concern at Israel's non-compliance with Security Council resolution 487 (1981)". That resolution condemned Israel's attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor and had called on Israel to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.

The Assembly was scheduled to take up this afternoon the report of the Secretary-General on the return of cultural property, and elect 29 members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

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The Secretary-General has reiterated his call for a negotiated settlement to the 13-year long conflict in Afghanistan, stating that there "is no alternative to a political solution".

In a report to the Security Council of 17 October, the Secretary-General said the situation in Afghanistan had reached a "critical stage", but that a "unique opportunity" existed to resolve the question. Durable peace in Afghanistan could only be reached through a political settlement, he said.

The joint decision by the Soviet Union and the United States in January to end weapons deliveries to all Afghan sides should give further impetus to efforts to achieve a political solution, he said. He urged all other Governments concerned to take "urgently similar decisions" and halt not only the supply of arms, but also stop financing the purchase of arms.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar also called for an urgent solution to the problem of Afghan political prisoners as well as prisoners of war -- Soviet citizens and others -- who were still in captivity. He appealed to the Afghan Government as well as to the resistance movement to release all prisoners, saying that such a step was essential for the achievement of a comprehensive political settlement.

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The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba, told a press conference at Headquarters today that the situation of ozone depletion was worsening.

Reporting the new findings of an intergovernmental panel of 80 scientists from 25 countries, Director of Process Studies at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Dr. Bob Watson, said that the rate of decrease in the ozone layer was increasing in both Northern and Southern hemispheres, and called the situation "disturbing". Ozone depletion in Antarctica had expanded from a winter occurrence into other seasons, including summer and spring, which meant that a larger percentage of the world would now be exposed to ultra-violet radiation.

Dr. Watson went on to say that new findings showed that the depletion was still largely due to human activity. Ozone depletion had occurred at a rate of 3 per cent in the last decade over Europe and North America and an additional ozone loss of 3 per cent was expected before the end of the century. This could lead to significant changes in climate and give rise to damaged crops and increased cases of skin cancer.

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A United Nations spokeswoman announced today that direct talks in Mexico City between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) had recessed late last night, following 10 days of negotiations held "in a cordial and constructive atmosphere".

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"Significant progress" was registered on the issue of armed forces, but important questions remained, which would be addressed when talks resume on 3 November. An initial exploration of a conceptual character on cease-fire arrangements in light of the New York agreement also took place, the spokeswoman said.

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